ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE EXTERIOR REHABILITATION OF BUILDINGS IN ROCKVILLE'S HISTORIC DISTRICTS

STREETSCAPE

Adopted September 1977

ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

ELEMENTS OF THE ROCKVILLE STREETSCAPE

The older areas of Rockville contain a number of different streetscapes and building types. Each of these is unique, yet each contributes to the character and appearance of the city as a whole.

The streetscape is composed of many elements: yards, trees, fences, sidewalks, and, of course, the buildings and their individual elements such as porches and bays. One street may be framed by deep, shaded front lawns and larger houses separated from each other by spacious side yards and gardens. Other streets may be lined with smaller houses and yards, located much closer to the street. In each case, however, a sense of rhythmic progression is achieved by the regular alternation of buildings with spaces, of solids with voids. Moreover, a continuous play of light and shadow is set up by porch and roof overhangs and the canopy of tree foliage overhead.

Although the elements of Rockville's houses and streetscapes might seem to have been assembled at random over an extended period of time, there is really nothing accidental or haphazard about their successful composition. Original designers of Rockville's past took great care in the siting and orientation of their buildings so that they would balance the open green space and the street as a whole. The balance thus achieved is not a static one; it is bound to change over time with the growth of trees, the change of seasons, the addition or removal of buildings; and the building modifications that are a result of necessary upkeep. However, any change, no matter how minor, that is wrought unthinkingly or without concern for the whole is nearly certain to detract from the harmonious balance of pleasing qualities in house and street.

The following series of sketches has been developed to show in a visual way how the various elements go together to compose a streetscape, and how the individual buildings and their elements function as visual components of the neighborhood setting as a whole.

THE FRAMING OF A ROCKVILLE STREETSCAPE

Each street receives its own identity from the elements along its edges.







The Street

A major organizing element, the street also serves as a visual introduction to the character of a town or neighborhood.

Buildings

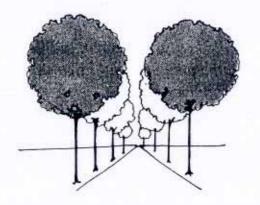
A series of buildings establishes boundaries and spatial definition by enclosing the street along both its sides.

Building Details

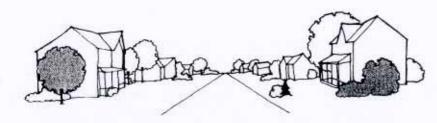
Porches, bays, windows, doorways, and chimneys are elements that serve to personalize individua houses and reduce massive volumes to human scale



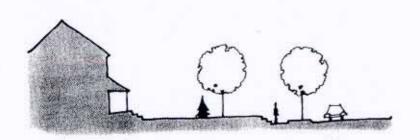
TREES AND VEGETATION IN THE ROCKVILLE STREETSCAPE



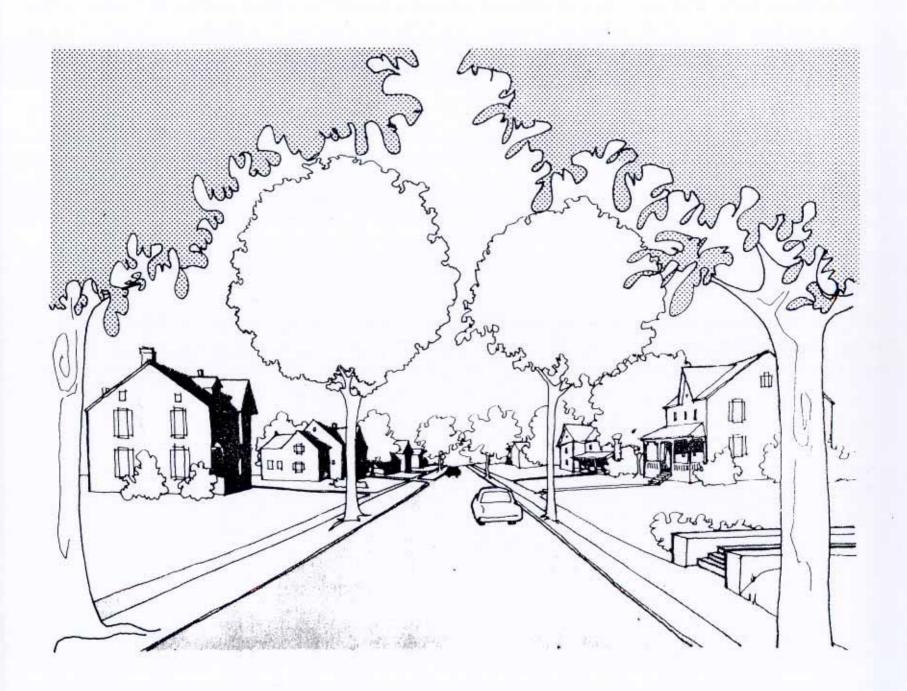
Trees lining a street add rhythmic progression and definition to the street edge and create a seasonal canopy that reinforces the sense of enclosure along the "top boundary" of the street.



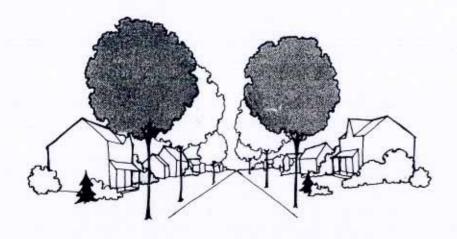
Trees and vegetation enrich the spaces between buildings and add texture to the side boundaries of the streetscape.



Foliage placed between the house and the street serves as a screen for visual privacy and as a buffer against noise.

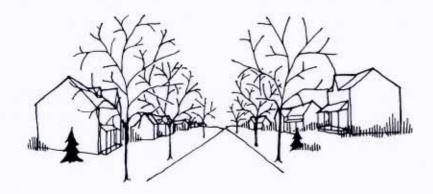


VEGETATION AND SEASONAL CHANGE



Summer Months

Full foliage and vegetation fill spaces, lend color, and sometimes partially obscure houses from view.



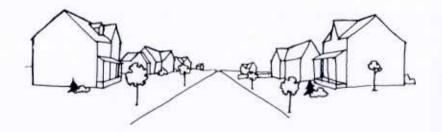
Winter Months

As foliage disappears from trees, building outlines become more apparent. Evergreens remain a constant in the streetscape throughout seasonal change.

THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND GROWTH OF VEGETATION

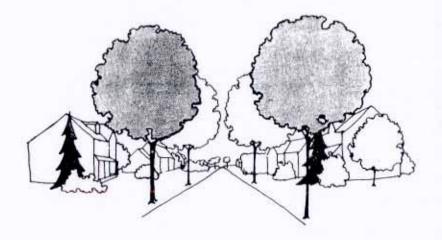
Early Stages of Growth

Often, years must pass before young trees and other vegetation reach the level of growth that best complements the house.



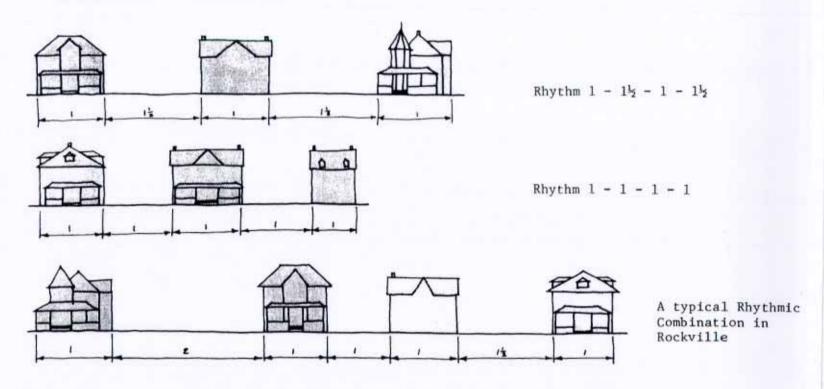
Mature Growth

Once attained, the balance of textures between house and foliage needs to be preserved by careful yard maintenance, especially the pruning of hedges and shrubbery.



THE ROCKVILLE STREETSCAPE: A RHYTHMIC SEQUENCE OF BUILDINGS AND SPACES

As one moves down a street, one usually experiences a more or less ordered, recurrent rhythm of solids and voids (building/space/building/space) in patterns that vary from street to street. Some of the more predominant patterns found in Rockville are illustrated below:



The rhythm of a streetscape is strongest where houses are related to one another in size (i.e., height, width, volume) and in general proportions even though they may be built in different styles.

Public Zone (Public Way)

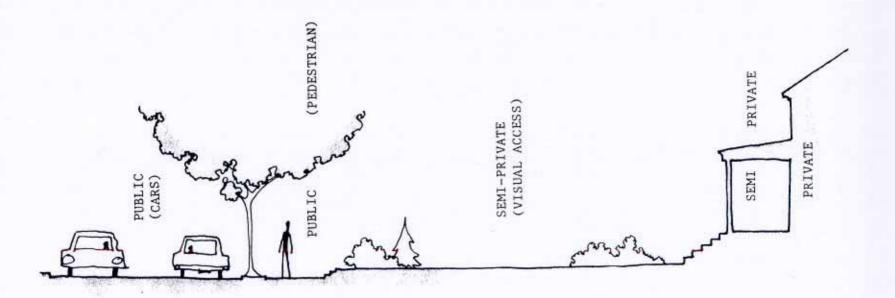
This is the area of open public access for vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Sidewalks provide an important vantage point from which the passers-by may view the house, yards, and streetscape as a whole.

Semi-Private Zone

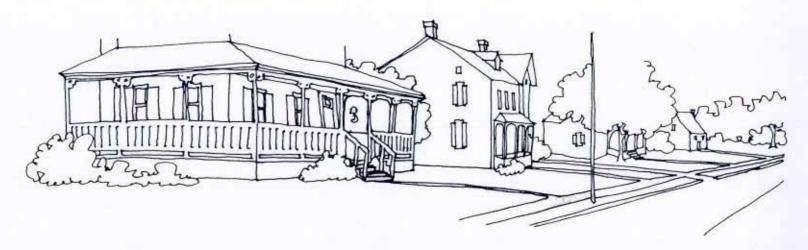
This significant transitional zone is formed by front yards and porches. Although private property, this transitional zone seems in a visual sense, to belong sometimes more to the house and at other times more to the public way.

Private Zone

In the final stage of the public-to-private transition, access and visibility to this zone (the interior of a house) are limited to occupants and those whom they choose to admit.



THE FRONT YARD: AN IMPORTANT TRANSITIONAL ZONE BETWEEN PUBLIC WAY AND PRIVATE HOUSE



The Shallow Yard

A more direct contact is established between public way and private house.

The shallow yard is fronted usually by relatively small, more compact houses.

There is a sense of close proximity to the street, which is lessened wherever there is terracing, landscaping, or an elevated house with steps.

Porch and front openings are more exposed to public view, often resulting in owners' putting up new screens, heavy drapery, and other devices to protect privacy.



The Deep Yard

A more gradual transition is obtained from public way to private house.

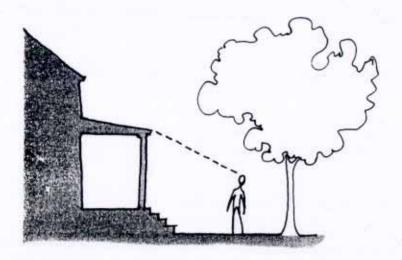
Usually larger and more spacious homes front the street.

There is a strong sense of distance from the street and of privacy for house and porch.

Porch and front facade seem more secluded, although they still serve as strong visual focal points for the passer-by.

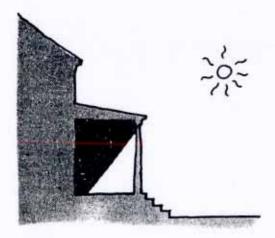
THE FRONT PORCH: ANOTHER IMPORTANT TRANSITIONAL ZONE BETWEEN HOUSE AND STREET

Besides marking the physical transition from outside to inside, the front porch is an aesthetic element in the alternation of solid and void, light and shadow, that characterizes the Rockville streetscape.



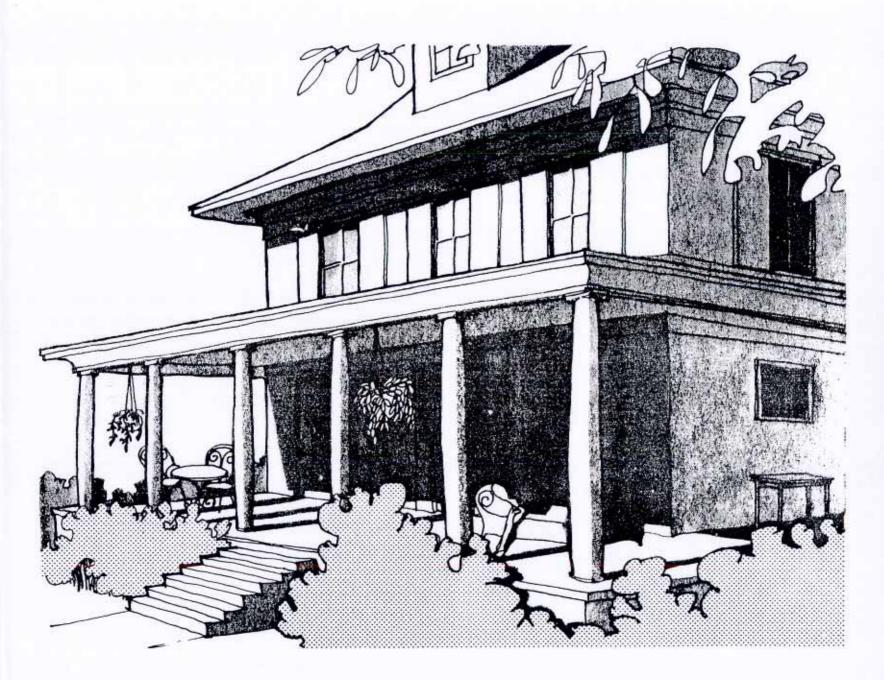
It establishes a "top boundary" along the street that is lower and closer to human scale than the main roofs.

It creates a layer of shade around the house and its openings, keeping the inside cooler in hot weather.



It provides an indoor-outdoor place for sociable activities when weather permits.

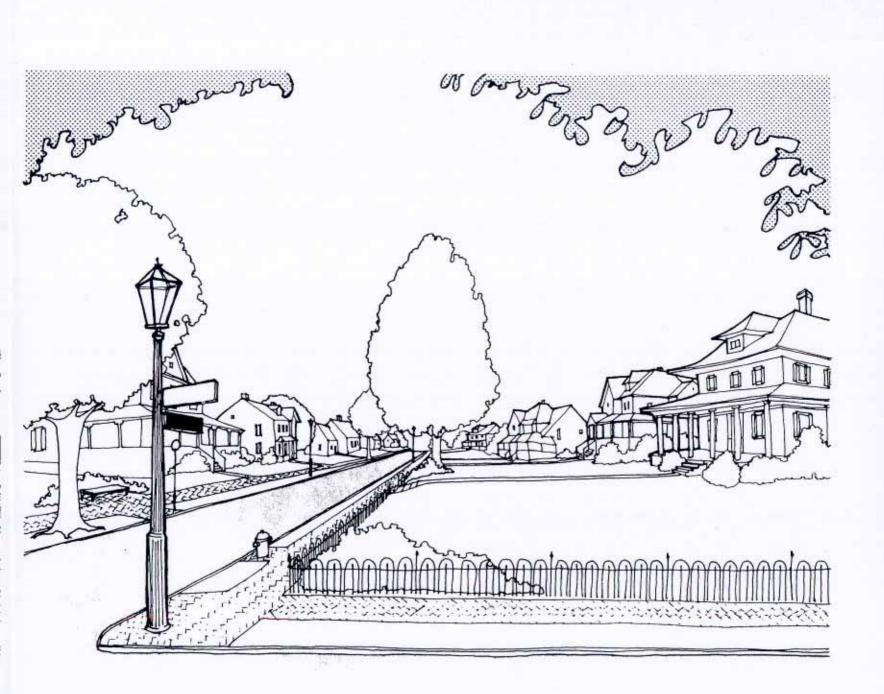
It affords an ideal display area for plants, furniture, and other ornaments that personalize a house.



STREET FURNITURE

In every streetscape there are numerous items of "street furniture" which not only serve various functional purposes but also add visual richness and flavor to the neighborhood. As such, they are to be considered among the significant elements that combine to make each streetscape a balanced, harmonious whole. The following are some of the elements that commonly fall into this category:

- Traffic signs and signal lights
- Street markers
- Street lamps
- Mail boxes
- Fire hydrants
- Bus shelters and benches
- Trash receptacles
- Sidewalks
- Low walls and fences
- Steps
- Markers for individual home addresses
- Office and professional signs
- Gaslights at individual buildings



ALTERATION OF ELEMENTS IN A ROCKVILLE STREETSCAPE

Each streetscape in Rockville has a unique character made up of many elements. Alteration of any of these elements can result in adverse change or loss of that character.

Vehicular Traffic

Increase in traffic load (through the creation of new streets or the widening of existing ones) often makes the streetscape a less safe and pleasant place to frequent.

Public-to-Private Transition

Neglect or loss of any element (such as the truncation of a front yard, or the removal of a porch) can detract from the feeling and effectiveness of the neighborhood.

Solid/Void Rhythm

The original solid/void balance may be upset by the loss of a house, its replacement by a building of a different scale, or the filling in of open yards with incompatible new structures.

Trees and Vegetation

Destruction or overgrowth may lessen the quality, texture, and harmony of the streetscape.

Street Furniture

Failure to integrate various elements of street furniture or the introduction of incompatible new features will tend to disrupt the larger harmony of the streetscape.



